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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI FM SHALOM VISITS PARIS, TOULOUSE

REF: PARIS 7398

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS
ONS 1.4 B/D

1. (C) Summary: Israeli FM Sylvan Shalom concluded a 3-day visit to France on Saturday, October 29 after visiting Paris and Toulouse. Although Shalom's visit was planned as the latest in a series of bilateral efforts to improve the Israeli-French relationship, international issues predominated, especially after the Iranian President's widely condemned remarks calling for Israel to be "wiped off the map" (reftel). In a private meeting with Douste-Blazy, Shalom forcefully argued against the inclusion of Hamas in the Palestinian political process, a demarche that a French diplomat called "disappointing." End summary.

2. (C) Shalom arrived on October 27 and, while in Paris, met with FM Douste-Blazy, Senate President Christian Poncelet and Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy. A local Israeli Embassy contact told Poloff October 26 that Shalom's visit should be seen as a follow-up to Prime Minister Sharon's visit to France in July and FM Douste-Blazy's visit to Israel in September. The Israeli and French governments are working to upgrade their cultural and educational ties, said the Israeli diplomat.

3. (C) On October 28, Poloff met with Herve Besancenot, the MFA's DAS-equivalent for Egypt and the Levant, and discussed Shalom's visit. Besancenot said Douste-Blazy and Shalom discussed a range of current issues in their private meeting, including the Middle East Peace Process, the political process in Gaza, Iran nuclear challenges and the Iranian President's widely condemned remarks. According to Besancenot, Shalom criticized Palestinian PM Abbas for failure to reign in militants and urged France to support the political isolation of Hamas. Besancenot said France had expected a more moderate line from Shalom, and feared that the Israeli government was engaged in a process of "Arafatization" of Abbas. In addition, France had hoped, said Besancenot, that Shalom would be more pragmatic regarding Hamas' participation in the Palestinian political process. Nevertheless, France was pleased that Shalom appeared more open to the idea of an EU-led mission to monitor the Gaza/Egypt border, said Besancenot.

4. (C) On Iran, Shalom praised France's condemnation of Ahmadi-Nejad's remarks, although he said nobody should be surprised by what Ahmadi-Nejad said. Shalom said Ahmadi-Nejad was following the same line as that of former President Rafsanjani, although Ahmadi-Nejad was less sophisticated. Besancenot also said Shalom praised French/U.S. cooperation on Syria/Lebanon. Iraq was not discussed.

5. (C) At the tail end of Shalom's visit, he and Douste-Blazy addressed a regional umbrella group of Jewish organizations (CRIF-Toulouse) in Toulouse. According to APP Toulouse, Shalom reprised the same themes he had focused on in official meetings in Paris. He emphasized that Hezbollah should be viewed in the same light as al-Qaida and discussed Israeli efforts to upgrade relations with moderates in the Muslim world. Shalom also praised French efforts as exemplary in fighting anti-Semitism.

6. (SBU) In his follow-on speech, Douste-Blazy focused on the need to assist Gaza in building its rule of law and political stability, and raised the continued importance of the Road Map with regards to the Middle East Peace Process. Straying from his prepared remarks, Douste-Blazy said that at first, Israeli Prime Minister Sharon had not impressed him. However, said Douste-Blazy, his opinion of Sharon changed after a long conversation with him in which the Israeli PM said he was tired of war and had become a man of peace. Douste-Blazy said he came away from that meeting very impressed with Sharon.

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